

PLAYING GAMES

**The Alternative History of
Peter the Great**

*Inaugural Lecture
delivered by*

LINDSEY HUGHES

**School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University College London
2000**

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LINDSEY HUGHES

*Professor of Russian History,
SSEES, University College London*

at the School of Slavonic and East European
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PLAYING GAMES: THE ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF PETER THE GREAT

LINDSEY HUGHES

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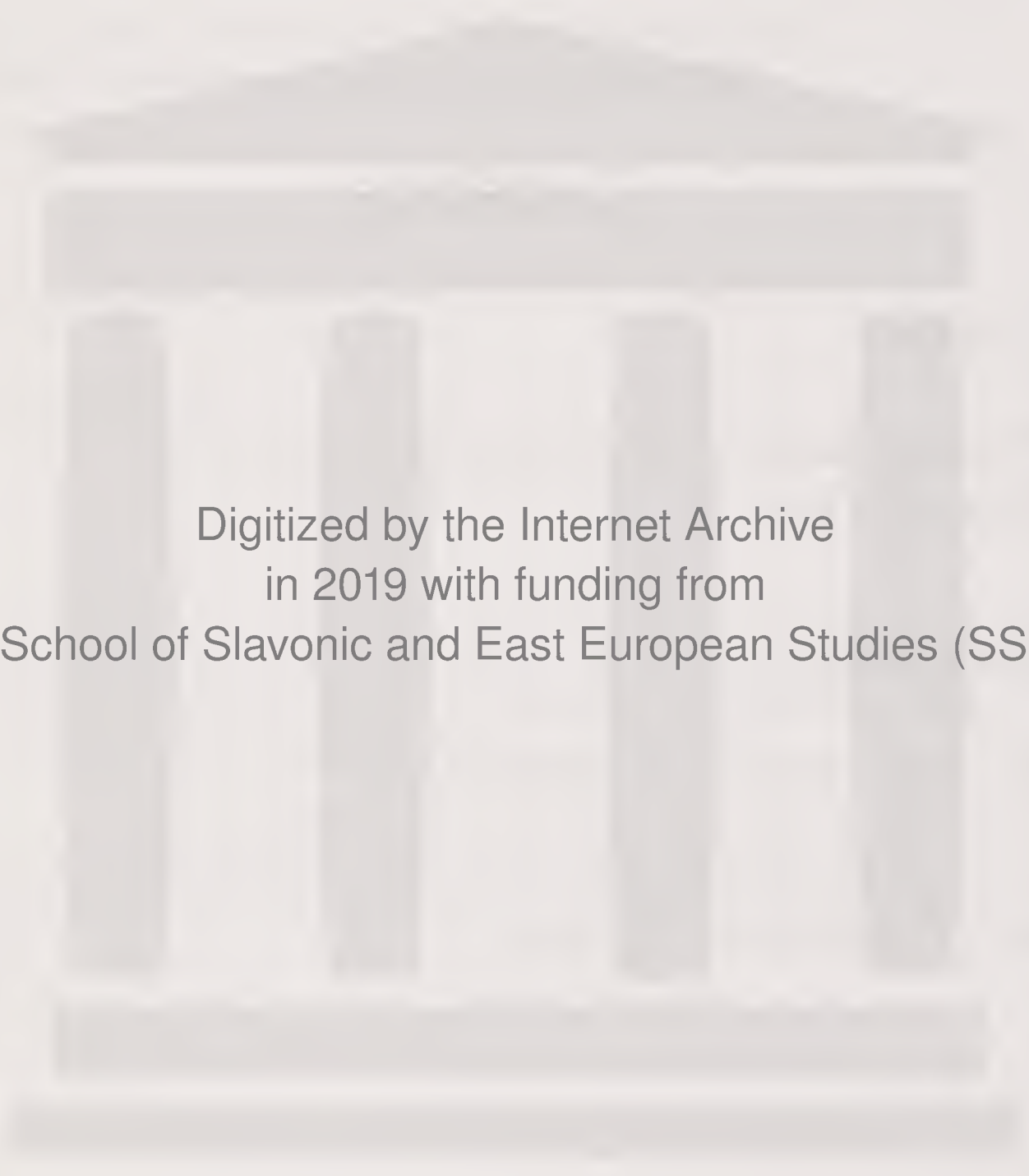
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Playing Games: The Alternative History of Peter the Great

PEOPLE often ask how I became interested enough in Peter the Great to spend several years writing a six-hundred-page book about his reign.¹ Here is a partial answer: a seed of interest was sown at Sussex University when, as a student of Russian Studies in the early 1970s taking a course on ‘Russian Literary Ornamentation and the Grotesque in the Twentieth Century’, I read a novella by Iurii Tynianov called ‘The Wax Effigy’ (*Voskovaia persona* [1929]). It is 28 January 1725. Peter dies in the Winter Palace in St Petersburg and Carlo Rastrelli, an Italian sculptor, is summoned to take casts and measurements from the corpse to make a wax model. The terrifyingly life-like effigy is eventually removed to Peter’s Chamber of Curiosities — the *Kunstkamera* — where it is displayed along with a group of stuffed dogs and babies bottled in spirits. Here it is encountered by a live exhibit or intelligent ‘monster’, the six-fingered Iakov, who accidentally activates a mechanism which makes the model stand up.

This and other scenes in Tynianov’s story, all with some basis in fact, conjured up monsters and grotesques in a world ‘made strange’, where reality and illusion were hazily defined. Early eighteenth-century Russia sounded like a sort of freak-show or waxworks, which I found intriguing. But when I explored the standard textbooks, the Petrine era seemed full of immensely sensible, concrete things, like the foundation of the navy, expansion of the empire and reform of the government and economy. Pig iron featured strongly.

1 Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, Newhaven, CT and London, 1998.

So, although I could appreciate the great significance of the Petrine era as a watershed in Russian history, an era of modernization and Westernization, the textbook version failed to grip my undergraduate imagination. I decided to stick with seventeenth-century Russia for my doctoral research and beyond and remained with it until the early 1990s, when I began to write *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, a natural sequel to my examination of the life and regime of Peter's half-sister, Sophia.²

Several years of research involved, among other things, working through first the published, then the unpublished volumes of Peter's letters and papers. It soon became clear that Peter's reign was indeed full of paradox and ambiguity. Yes, Peter was fighting the Swedes, building St Petersburg, encouraging industry, and much else besides, but he was also playing games. Here was a six-foot seven-inch giant who liked to travel incognito, often dressed up as a workman or ship's carpenter, enjoyed rude jokes and the company of dwarfs and appointed a mock tsar and a mock patriarch. And this held good not just during his childhood but throughout his life. Some of this is mentioned in regular textbooks and you can find a good deal about it in my own study of Peter's reign, but I did not quite have the courage to write the alternative history. So today I welcome the chance to put on the mask of the Alternative Historian and explore in more detail some of the games Peter played.

Perhaps I should reassure members of the audience that I do not have in mind the sort of games which Bill and Monika played, although Peter was a living legend in that respect, too. On this occasion we shall make do with just one example: Princess Wilhelmina of Bayreuth, who met Peter in Berlin in 1719, reported that his wife Catherine was accompanied by four hundred serving women, each holding a baby. In answer to the question, whose child is that, they replied: 'It is the tsar's'.³ (Wilhelmina was a fourteen-year-old girl with a vivid imagination. Even so, she touches on an aspect of Peter's life which is still open for future scholarly investigation.)

Let me start with aspects of games-playing which formed part of the approved biography in Peter's own lifetime and still have some resonance today. To quote from an English translation of Peter's Naval Statute of 1720: 'But this Monarch was so particularly remarkable in all he did, that

2 Lindsey Hughes, *Sophia Regent of Russia, 1657–1704*, New Haven, CT and London, 1990.

3 E. Anisimov (ed.), *Petr Velikii. Vospominaniia. Dnevnikovye zapisi. Anekdoty*, St Petersburg, 1993, p. 157.

the very Pastimes of his Childhood are esteem'd, as Transactions momentous and weighty, and appear worthy to be recorded in History'.⁴

The discourse goes like this: late seventeenth-century Russia was still a child when compared with its mature Western neighbours. The inscription on Peter's personal seal during his visit to the West in 1697–98 — 'I am a student and I seek teachers' — referred as much to Russia as to himself. But childhood games, combined with lessons, led to mature achievements. Thus the new navy originated with Peter's little boat and the reformed army with his play troops.

The Preface to the Naval Statute, a sort of secular hagiography co-authored by Peter and his chief publicist Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, recounts the story of Peter's discovery in a barn in 1688 of an English sailing boat in which he learned to sail and which came to be known as the 'grandfather' of the Russian fleet. In Prokopovich's formulation, the boat becomes an emblem illustrating the apt aphorism that 'great oaks from little acorns grow'. The little boat grows into a great navy; the little boy into a great man. Peter steering the Russian ship remains a potent image today.⁵

In 1723 Peter brought the little boat from Moscow to St Petersburg where it was the centrepiece of regattas in May and August, steered by Peter among the warships of the Russian navy, 'in order that the good grandfather could receive due honour from all his splendid grandsons'. On dry land it was displayed on a plinth bearing the inscription 'The amusement of the child brought the triumph of the man.'⁶

4 'The Story of the Ship's Boat which gave his Majesty the Thought of building Ships of War' (Preface to the Naval Statute of 1720), in J. Cracraft (ed.), *For God and Peter the Great. The Works of Thomas Consett, 1723–1729*, Boulder, CO, 1982, p. 210. (The Englishman Consett refers to the 'mother' or 'matron' of the fleet.)

5 The Statute's frontispiece features a sailing boat without a wheel with a naked boy sitting in it. A winged figure representing Time offers him a wheel. See M. A. Alekseeva, *Graviura petrovskogo vremeni*, Leningrad, 1990, p. 185; T. A. Bykova and T. A. Gurevich (eds.), *Opisanie izdaniia grazhdanskoi pechati. 1708–ianv. 1725 gg. Dopolneniia i prilozheniia*, Leningrad, 1972, p. 38. Prokopovich further elaborated these ideas in a sermon in praise of the Russian fleet, which relates how it was founded thanks to Divine Providence bringing Peter face to face with the 'small, dilapidated, discarded dinghy': 'Who will deny that this small dinghy was to the fleet as the seed is to the tree? From that seed there grew this great, marvellous, winged, weapon-bearing tree. O little boat, worthy of being encased in gold!' See 'Slovo pokhvalnoe o flote rossiiskom' (written to celebrate the Russian naval victory at Grengam, July 1720) in Feofan Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, ed. I. P. Eremin, Moscow and Leningrad, 1961, pp. 103–12.

6 Jacques Campredon described the May regatta in a letter to Louis XV, 13 June (NS), *Sbornik imperatorskogo rossiiskogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter *SIRIO*), 49, pp. 345ff. See also *Pokhodnye zhurnaly Petra I, 1695–1726*, St Petersburg, 1853–

From the start naval games combined with military ones. The story goes that in the 1680s Peter discovered about 300 men idle at a former royal hunting lodge (Peter, by the way, disliked the favoured sport of medieval and early modern rulers) and redeployed them to form 'play' (*poteshnye*) infantry regiments, which later formed the élite core of the reformed army, their names taken from the adjacent royal villages of Preobrazhenskoe and Semenovskoe. The embryonic guards had a scaled-down wooden fortress which Peter named Presburg. The Tsar served in the ranks, while all the officers were foreigners.⁷

In September 1694 Peter staged the so-called 'Kozhukhovo manoeuvres' in which some 30,000 men, including the play regiments, participated. Two armies, one commanded by Prince Fedor Romodanovskii, dubbed the 'King of Presburg' (more of him anon), and the other by Ivan Buturlin, the 'King of Poland', fought mock battles, which included an assault with explosives on a specially constructed fortress, which left twenty-four dead and fifteen wounded. A year later, in 1695, Peter attempted and failed to capture a real Turkish fortress at Azov. In 1696 he succeeded.⁸

Childhood games might have stopped there. By 1696 Peter was a big boy of twenty-four with a wife and a six-year-old son. To quote the leading Russian Petrine expert Evgenii Anisimov, 'the "play" soldiers and the English boat found in a barn did not remain mere toys, but became the

55 (hereafter *PZh*), 1723, p. 15; archive of the Leningradskoe otделение instituta istorii Akademii nauk (now Sankt-Peterburgskii filial instituta rossiiskoi istorii Rossiiskoi akademii nauk) (hereafter LOI), f. 270, d. 103, l. 644. Engravings of the boat made in Moscow by Ivan Zarudnii and Ivan Zubov, in Alekseeva, *Graviura petrovskogo vremeni*, pp. 86–87. See also M. Sarantola-Weiss, 'Peter the Great's First Boat, "Grandfather of the Russian Navy"' in M. di Salvo and L. Hughes (eds), *A Window on Russia: Papers from the V International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-century Russia*, Gargnano, 1994, Rome, 1996, pp. 37–41.

7 A. Kartsov, *Istoriia leib-gvardii Semenovskogo polka. 1685–1852*, 2 vols, St Petersburg, 1852, I, pp. 3–5, 16–20; *ibid.*, appendix, p. 3. G. V. Esipov (ed.), *Sbornik vypisok iz arkhivnykh bumag o Petre Velikom*, 2 vols, Moscow, 1872 (hereafter *Sbornik vypisok*), I, p. 148. On the 'playmate regiments', see entry by D. Schlafly under that heading in *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Joseph L. Wiczyński, 59 vols, Gulf Breeze, FL, 1976–96, XXVIII (1982), pp. 119–22.

8 B. A. Kurakin, 'Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche', in N. I. Pavlenko (comp.), *Rossiiu podnial na dyby*, 2 vols, Moscow, 1987, I, pp. 379–80; R. Warner, 'The Kozhukhovo Campaign of 1694', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 13, 1965, pp. 487–96. After the capture of Azov in 1696, a model of Azov fortress was constructed in Moscow. For Peter's name-day in June 1699 three such fortresses were stormed by infantry while the Tsar and courtiers dined in tents: see I. A. Zheliabuzhskii, 'Zapiski' in A. B. Bogdanov (ed.), *Rossii pri tsarevne Sof'e i Petre I*, Moscow, 1990, p. 275.

foundation of the future grandiose cause of transforming Russia'.⁹ But I believe that Peter, like his namesake Peter Pan, never grew up. An absolute passion for messing about in boats remained with him throughout his life, a near obsession which went far beyond rational, national needs, to the extent that he has been accused of creating 'a gigantic, complex and expensive toy, built and operated for his personal gratification'.¹⁰

In the new city of St Petersburg matters navigational impinged at all times; for example, the whole court was expected to take part in regular 'marine assemblies' (*vodiannye asamblei*) or regattas, examples of which Peter had witnessed in Holland and England. Non-attendance was met with the same sort of penalties as dereliction of military or naval duty. A flavour can be found in Peter's order to the St Petersburg police chief, July 30 1723:

There has been constant disobedience about attending the marine assemblies, and today attendance was especially poor [...]. Therefore those who were not in their barges, except for legitimate reasons, are to be fined fifty roubles tomorrow [...] if they offend again the fine will be doubled, and for a third offence they will be banished to the spinning mills.¹¹

But equally, Peter could enjoy a running *joke* about something which he normally took very seriously: shipbuilding. Peter's chief shipwright or 'surveyor' (*obor-sarviir*) was the nobleman Ivan Mikhailovich Golovin, whom Peter always addressed as *Baas* (from the Dutch). In fact, Golovin had failed miserably when forced to study shipbuilding abroad. He was a mock chief shipwright.¹² Just one example of this extended charade will suffice: On 2 January 1714 Peter and several English shipwrights — Browne, Richard Cozens and Joseph Nye — wrote to Golovin with New Year greetings, expressing the hope that 'this great enterprise [that is,

9 E. V. Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion*, trans. J. Alexander, New York, 1993, p. 14.

10 M. S. Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 2nd edn, London, 1995, p. 99.

11 *Bumagi imp. Petra I, izdannye akademikom A. Bychkovym*, St Petersburg, 1873, p. 519. On 1 September it was reported that fifty-rouble fines had been collected from Admiral Apraksin, James Bruce, Cornelius Cruys and Peter Apraksin, all close associates of Peter's: *ibid.*, pp. 520–21. In June 1723 a lesser fine of fifteen roubles was imposed on nine people who failed to turn up to greet the arrival of the 'grandfather of the Russian navy' in St Petersburg: LOI, f. 270, d. 103, l. 535.

12 As the Hanoverian diplomat Friedrich Weber explained: 'His Majesty to punish him, though without any Mark of Disgrace, declared him, for Jest-sake, Surveyor of his Ships by the Titles Knees Baas': Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, 2 vols, London, 1722–23 [anonymous translation of *Das veranderte Russland*], reprint, London and New York, 1968, I, pp. 242–43. He was 'chef de l'amirauté par dérision': Jacques Campredon in *SIRIO*, 40, p. 381 (September 1723).

shipbuilding] will increase and grow to your immortal glory as the leader of that enterprise in Russia or our second Noah'.¹³ Peter even introduced a new toast: 'for the health of the sons of Ivan Mikhailovich', that is, the ships of the Russian fleet.¹⁴

It will be noted that Peter's mock deference to the incompetent Golovin was acted out in the role of trainee shipwright, although Peter himself was actually quite an accomplished shipbuilder, having studied in Holland and England in 1697–98. An even more remarkable example of simulated humility was Peter's appointment, in the early 1690s, of a substitute or mock tsar whom he called 'Prince-Caesar' (*kniaz'-kezar'*), a role played until his death in 1717 by Prince Fedor Iur'evich Romodanovskii, who was succeeded by his son Ivan, thus forming a mock dynasty.¹⁵ For a time there was even a 'junior sovereign', Ivan Buturlin, in a parody of the joint rule of Peter and his half-brother Ivan, who had performed the useful function of *legitimate* 'stand-in' for Peter, decked out in full regalia, at religious ceremonies and other state occasions. After Ivan's death in 1696, Romodanovskii became even more invaluable.

King Fedor 'ruled' from his 'capital city of Presburg' (Preobrazhenskoe). Peter's letters to him were addressed to variations of 'Min Her Konich' or to Sire (Siire, Siir).¹⁶ Romodanovskii on occasions lorded it over his 'subject', for example, scolding Peter for failing to remove his hat in his 'sovereign's' presence.¹⁷ It was Romodanovskii who authorized the wages which *Piter Michailof* drew from the Admiralty for his work as shipwright.¹⁸

13 *Sbornik Mukhanova*, 2nd edn, St Petersburg, 1866, p. 251; LOI, f. 270, d. 75, l. 5 (2 January 1714). See translation below, p. 28.

14 F. W. von Bergholz, *Dnevnik kammer-iunkera Berkhgol'tsa, vedennyi im v Rossii v tsarstvovanie Petra Velikogo s 1721–1725 g.*, 2 vols, Moscow, 1857–60 (hereafter *Dnevnik*), 1721, p. 205, recorded such a toast at the wedding of Prince Repnin, but did not understand what it meant. See also LOI, f. 270, d. 94, l. 70, and my 'For the Health of the Sons of Ivan Mikhailovich: I. M. Golovin and Peter I's Mock Court' in S. Dixon and J. Klein (eds), *Proceedings of the VI International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia*, Leiden (forthcoming).

15 Peter's adherence to the 'mock' hereditary principle is underlined by his letter to Fedor Iur'evich of 21 November 1704, translated below. Name-day greetings were sent to 'our sovereign tsarevich and great prince Ioann Fedorovich' in July 1706 (*Pisma i bumagi Imperatora Petra Velikogo*, 13 vols [continuing], 1887–1992 [hereafter *PiB*], IV, p. 305).

16 See *PiB*, I, pp. 18–19 (announcement about Peter's second visit to Archangel in March 1694), p. 162; Zheliabuzhskii, 'Zapiski', pp. 215–16; Kurakin, 'Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche', pp. 378–79.

17 L. N. Maikov, *Rasskazy Nartova o Petre Velikom*, St Petersburg, 1891, p. 94.

18 *PiB*, I, p. 424 (29 January 1701). The Tsar's pseudonym often appears written in Latin script. See translation below.

In 1697–98 Romodanovskii ‘reigned’ while Peter went on the Great Embassy as Mikhailov, leaving the main diplomatic business to his plenipotentiary ambassadors.¹⁹ In 1698 the prince received the returning ambassadors, who presented him with their credentials and a monkey while Peter lurked among the rank and file.²⁰ Romodanovskii was always among the first to receive notification from his ‘humble subject’ of Russia’s victories, for example the capture in May 1703 of a Swedish fortress near the future St Petersburg,²¹ and the great victory at Poltava in 1709.²² In March 1711, when Peter left Moscow for the Turkish war, Romodanovskii was again appointed ‘Tsar of Russia’.²³ After the Russian victory at Cape Hangö in Finland in July 1714, Peter won promotion to vice-admiral from His Majesty.²⁴ And so on. His last letter to Prince-Caesar is dated 1724.²⁵

Just in case it looks as though the joke was on the Romodanovskiis — perhaps, like Golovin, they too were being mocked for incompetence or pilloried as members of the old nobility — we need to add a crucial detail:

19 See letter of 31 August 1697, printed below.

20 J.-G. Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Czar Peter the Great*, trans. and ed. Count MacDonnell, 2 vols, London 1863/1968 (hereafter *Diary*), I, pp. 195–96.

21 *PiB*, II, p. 159 (May 2), with a request that ‘this victory be celebrated properly’ with prayers and cannon-fire.

22 *PiB*, IX/1, pp. 227–28, 242–43, 983.

23 Just Juel, ‘Iz zapisok datskogo poslannika Iusta Iula’ (hereafter ‘Iz zapisok’), *Russkii arkhiv*, 30, 1892, 3, p. 130. Apparently unaware of the long history of this substitution, Juel wrote that this was a ‘joke’ at Romodanovskii’s expense.

24 He wrote ordering Menshikov to ensure that ‘our sovereign should arrive as soon as possible, by 1 September’ and that triumphal arches should be erected: LOI, f. 270, d. 76, ll. 87, 119; *Materialy dlia istorii Gangutskoi operatsii*, 3 vols, Petrograd, 1914, I/2, pp. 209, 227. See letter printed below. Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, p. 36, described the ceremony, at which the assembled company ‘unanimously declared [Peter] Vice-Admiral of Russia in consideration of the faithful Service he had done to his native Country, of which Proclamation being made, the whole Room resounded with Sdrastwi Vice-Admiral, Health to the Vice-Admiral (which is the Russian Vivat.)’. Even official accounts of the Battle of Hangö maintained Peter’s incognito, referring to him as Mr Rear Admiral (*gospodin shaubeinakht*), for example, *Kniga Marsova ili Voinskikh del* [1713], St Petersburg, 1766, pp. 189–90. See also *Materialy dlia istorii Gangutskoi operatsii*, I/1, p. 36 (letter to Romodanovskii, 30 August 1713).

25 The new Prince-Caesar Ioann Fedorovich was received with great solemnity just before Easter 1718 (during Tsarevich Aleksei’s trial) and served with wine and brandy by Peter and Catherine in person: Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, p. 225. See letters below. See also letters of October 1723 (asking ‘Sire’ to deal with two arrested suspects) and January 1724, LOI, f. 270, d. 104, l. 177; *ibid.*, d. 106, l. 77, l. 343.

the Romodanovskiis really were powerful, for from 1696 father and son in turn headed the Preobrazhenskii office (*prikaz*), which had special powers to investigate and try crimes of treason and subversion (sovereign's word and deed).²⁶ Foreigners knew 'His Majesty' Fedor as lord chief-justice of Moscow, notorious for his severe and rigorous executions, with looks 'enough to make People tremble'.²⁷ Visitors to Romodanovskii's home were greeted by a bear with a glass of vodka which ripped off the hat or wig of anyone who refused the drink. He was a dangerous man to know.

But the Romodanovskiis were still involved in a dangerous game, for in Russia impersonating the tsar was a capital offence. They might recall the fate of Peter's uncle, Ivan Naryshkin, who during the Moscow musketeer rebellion in 1682 was tortured and torn to pieces by a mob, who demanded: 'How dare you pick up the royal regalia and robes and try them on? Did you want to become tsar?'²⁸ The Romodanovskiis were 'kings' only because the Tsar himself sanctioned it, but luckily for them the charade of Prince-Caesar was vitally necessary for Peter. On one level, he required a substitute in order to shed his own irksome royal identity — the titles, regalia and ritual — and play out his own roles. Both his army and navy career were conducted under pseudonyms, apparently allowing him to experience a sense of real achievement which might have been denied if commissions had been a mere perk for being tsar. The fact that Peter was unusually tall made these subterfuges especially provocative; maintenance of the pretence required the complicity of others. One is reminded of Hans Andersen's story of the Emperor's new clothes, where loyal subjects all admire the naked Emperor's imaginary garments. In Peter's case they had to pretend not to see the Emperor at all. Even fellow monarchs were willing to join in the game: in 1698 Peter attended a masquerade in Vienna dressed as a Friesian peasant and Emperor Leopold I toasted him with the words: 'I know that you are acquainted with the great Russian monarch, so let's drink to his health.'²⁹

Peter's behaviour looks like an upside-down version of the Russian pretender phenomenon, (*samozvanchestvo*), which is usually associated with impostors claiming to be tsars or tsarevichi, notably during the Time of Troubles.³⁰ In Peter's case, it was the tsar pretending to be a commoner.

Such behaviour was rare, but not unique: in 1574 Ivan the Terrible crowned a Tatar, Simeon Bekbulatovich, as tsar, while referring to himself

26 See N. B. Golikova, *Politicheskie protsessy pri Petre I*, Moscow, 1957, pp. 14–16.

27 Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, pp. 152–53.

28 Hughes, *Sophia Regent of Russia*, pp. 59–60.

29 O. Beliaev, *Dukh Petra Velikogo*, St Petersburg, 1798, pp.22–23; N. Ustrialov, *Istoriia tsarstvovanie Petra Velikogo*, 6 vols, St Petersburg, 1858–69, III, p. 142.

30 See M. Perrie, *Pretenders and Popular Monarchism in Early Modern Russia: The False Tsars of the Time of Troubles*, Cambridge, 1995.

as plain Ivan Moskovskii. This charade has been interpreted as a political struggle on a semiotic level to indicate that those who once ruled Russia (Tatars) were false tsars. Similarly, Ivan's mock crowning of boyars 'unmasked' the false claims of boyars to rule Russia. Ivan assumed identities and simulated self-abasement to get back at those who made claims upon him. He forced one boyar (Ivan Fedorov Cheliadin) to dress up as tsar and sit on the throne, then killed him for his insolence.³¹

The Russian scholar Boris Uspenskii sees Peter's deference to Romodanovskii also as a semiotic struggle, a polemic with the traditional Muscovite *image* of tsar, which was thereby undermined by ridicule:

the true, real Tsar, by shedding the *external* signs of his status as Tsar and forcing another to play what is to all intents and purposes the role of pretender, is in fact emphasizing as it were his own *authentic* right to the royal throne, independent of any formal attributes of kingship.³²

Prince-Caesar held court near Moscow, thus later investing the old, rejected capital with the role of mock 'substitute' for the new one, St Petersburg. This undermining of the old hierarchies was strengthened by association with the Drunken Assembly; mock court and mock synod parodied the Byzantine 'symphony' of power-sharing by tsardom and priesthood, which was so uncongenial to Peter.

The infamous All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly (*sumasbrodneishii, vseshuteishii, vsep'ianeishii sobor*) might be described as a sort of extended drinking circle — 200 persons or more — headed by

31 There are other examples. In 1571 Ivan dressed up in coarse cloth garments and sheep skins and told the Khan's envoys, who were demanding tribute, that he was poverty-stricken and could not pay. He sometimes used the pseudonym Parfenii Iurodivyi and adopted a mock humble tone in correspondence with the Polish King Stefan Batory. See D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v drevnei Rusi*, Leningrad, 1984. pp. 26–28. In part two of Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible*, it is Ivan's cousin and rival Prince Vladimir whom he has murdered after encouraging him to dress up and pretend to be tsar.

32 B. Uspenskii, 'Tsar and Pretender: *Samozvančestvo* or Royal Imposture in Russia as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon' (hereafter 'Tsar and Pretender') in Iu. Lotman and B. Uspenskii, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1984, p. 271. See also the as yet uncompleted doctoral work of Ernest Zitser of Columbia University, which focuses on 'the institutionalization of parodic spectacles and the ritualization of blasphemy at Peter's court in the context of Baroque court culture of late 17th-century European absolutist regimes'. Zitser proposes that 'parodic inversions of the political order constituted a meaningful narrative, which justified the fundamental reorganization of Muscovite political administration along the lines of the cameralist "well-ordered police state", by presenting the political authority of the tsar as the creative deeds of a demiurge bringing order out of chaos'. My thanks for Mr Zitser for allowing me to see selected drafts of his work.

a Prince-Pope (*kniaz'-papa*), in which laymen and a few women assumed mock ecclesiastical roles. (Peter was arch-deacon (*protodiakon*).³³ The Assembly was especially active at Yuletide, when its members went out carol-singing to collect money and hospitality, at Shrovetide and at various rites of passage. A flavour may be gleaned from a session in February 1699 at which Bacchus appeared stark naked except for a bishop's mitre and the insignia of Cupid and Venus and blessed the crowd with two crossed tobacco pipes.³⁴

Particularly notorious were the weddings of the Prince-Popes. At Nikita Zotov's in 1715 invitations to guests were delivered by stammerers, the runners were fat men with gout and the priest was allegedly almost a hundred years old. Prince-Caesar attended in a sled drawn by bears.³⁵ Peter wore a sailor's costume and a cortège of guests formed a joke orchestra, playing whistles and hooters and banging plates. This marriage was especially inappropriate (and therefore funnier) because (i) Zotov was over eighty years old (and old men marrying are stock characters in comedy); (ii) he had recently expressed the desire to enter a monastery; and (iii) both popes and patriarchs were supposed to be celibate.³⁶

After the wedding of Zotov's successor, the nobleman Peter Buturlin, in September 1721, at which masquerade costumes included Bacchus in a tiger-skin draped with vine leaves and giants dressed as babies, the bride and groom were led to an improvised bedchamber inside a wooden pyramid which had holes drilled in the walls for spectators. Day Two of the wedding feast saw a ceremonial crossing of the river by the Prince-Pope and his 'cardinals' on a bridge of linked barrels, led by Neptune on a sea monster. The Prince-Pope floated in a wooden bowl in a huge barrel of beer into which he was tipped when he reached the other side.³⁷

Buturlin's election as Prince-Pope had taken place in 1717 on the orders of Prince-Caesar, whose capital, Presburg, was the venue. In fact, the whole event was stage-managed by Peter, as was true of all the

33 There is as yet no comprehensive work on the Drunken Assembly. See discussions in Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, pp. 249–57; James Cracraft, *The Church Reform of Peter the Great*, London, 1971 (hereafter *Church Reform*), pp. 17–22.

34 Korb, *Diary*, I, pp. 255–56.

35 Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, pp. 89–90; I. Golikov, *Deianiia Petra Velikago*, 12 vols, Moscow, 1838, VI, pp. 277ff.

36 See petition from Zotov's son, Konon, appealing for the unseemly marriage to be cancelled, citing his father's reluctance and his fear of offending Peter, in M. Semevskii, 'Petr I kak iumorist' in Semevskii, *Slovo i delo! 1700–1725*, St Petersburg, 1884, pp. 292–94.

37 Bears, dogs and pigs, 'so well trained that they walked very obediently in harness', pulled carts: *PZh*, 1721, p. 74.

Drunken Assembly's activities. His parodic ceremonies, please note, contained hardly any specifically Orthodox imagery, no references to icons, for example, and no members of the real clergy were humiliated by being forced to take part. The mix of terminology was eclectic: we find the Pope (*Papa*), Bacchus, archimandrites, sufregans, conclaves (*konklavii*) and Arch-Guzzlers (*arkhizhretsy*) participating. Some elements in the ceremonies parodied papal elections (or Peter's notion of them): for example, candidates were forced to sit on chairs with holes in the seats so that their lower regions could be probed to make sure they were men; the inspectors were supposed to declare 'habet, habet, habet' if the correct parts were present, 'non habet' if they were not. (The reference, of course, is to Pope Joan.) The installation ceremony required the participants to consume bowls of salted cucumbers and cabbage. Vows were made on the theme of boozing: 'May the drunkenness of Bacchus be with you, forcing you to black out and tremble, knocking you over and driving you crazy all the days of your life.' There were blessings in the name of all taverns, tobaccos, vodkas, wines, tankards, jugs and so on. Peter also compiled a list of the Prince-Pope's attendants, in which everyone, including Peter himself, were given an obscene name based on the Russian for 'prick' (*khui*).³⁸

Parodies of this sort were an essential component of Petrine court life. I tend to view the Drunken Assembly as an aspect of patrimonial politics: the initiation ceremonies, spoof ranks and rude nicknames, boozing sessions, all bound people to Peter and to each other. The Assembly had something in common with other examples of male-bonding such as Hellfire clubs and Freemasonry, as well as older forms of Carnival, as we shall see later. It was an aim in its own right, not an exercise in teaching the Russian people a lesson about the evils of over-powerful organized religion (as Soviet historians and some Western ones have argued). Most of all, it seems to have answered a deep need in Peter himself. An English merchant, who observed the company's antics at Archangel in 1702, summed it up succinctly: 'None of them can complain of [the tsar's] frolics since he is allways [*sic*] the first man.'³⁹

38 The ceremonies and the list are printed in Semevskii, *Slovo i delo*, pp. 296–311 and 313–14, and A. F. Bychkov (ed.), *Pis'ma Petra Velikogo, khraniashchiesia v imp. Publichnoi Biblioteke*, St Petersburg, 1872, pp. 78–89, but in censored form, with the 'prick' references expunged. Fuller versions may be seen in mid-eighteenth-century copies of the originals, Rossiiskaia Publichnaia Biblioteka, otdel rukopisei, Ermitazhnoe, no. 450. The virtually untranslatable names include Archdeacons *pakhom pukhai khui* Mikhailov and *idi na khui* Stroev.

39 Thomas Hale, quoted in Cracraft, *Church Reform*, p. 10. Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, 1, pp. 90–91, favoured a similar explanation: 'the Czar among all the heavy

It is striking how often Peter's comedies coincided with tragedies; for example, the spoof election of 1717–18 overlapped with the return to Russia and the trial of his renegade son, Aleksei, whom Peter later condemned to death. In June 1718 Aleksei's funeral was followed by a particularly intense series of festivities. Peter changed masks with bewildering speed.

Was all this Peter's version of 'rebellious ritual', of 'group abdication from the structures of the social order itself'?⁴⁰ If it was, it was subversion with rules imposed from above. In both the mock court and the mock church assembly there was also a strong element of dressing up, of travesty (although not of transvestitism — I have encountered no evidence of Peter impersonating a woman), to the extent that 'serious' activity and play were sometimes indistinguishable. Peter's belief in the real transforming power of appearances was reflected in his famous decrees banning beards and imposing dress codes. He chose Western dress to designate the new life ('civilization'), demoting Old Russian dress to designate the old ('barbarism'). Prince-Caesar, for example, wore traditional Russian royal robes during ceremonies. To traditionalists, on the other hand, people wearing Western or 'German' clothes were 'dressed up as devils'.⁴¹ Clothes had semiotic value: they were part of a revised value-system.

Peter's own dress habits are especially significant. On the one hand, in the figurative arts — engraving, painting and sculpture — we witness the Westernization and Romanization of the tsar's image, encouraged by Peter himself. On the other hand, in his own life Peter deliberately and consistently debunked the trappings of power, behaving in an 'untsarlike' manner by wearing ordinary workman's or sailor's clothes, doing wood-turning at the lathe, dropping in unannounced at ordinary subjects' homes and so on, adopting personae which are hardly reflected in contemporary art.⁴²

Cares of Government knows how to set apart some Days for the Relaxation of his Mind, and how ingenious he is in the Contrivance of those Diversions'.

40 See Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, Stanford, CA, 1986 (hereafter *Masquerade and Civilization*).

41 Uspenskii, 'Tsar and Pretender', p. 273.

42 At the carnival in September 1723 Peter dressed in a sailor's costume, but one day he appeared dressed as a cardinal and proceeded to ordain four 'priests', then changed back into his sailor's outfit. The day ended in a massive drinking session at the house of Prince-Caesar: *SIRIO*, 40, p. 383–84. On Peter in art, see my forthcoming 'Images of Greatness: Portraits of Peter I' in L. Hughes (ed.), *Peter the Great and the West: New Perspectives*, Basingstoke and London, 2000, pp. 250–64.

Peter's love of masquerade, of the world turned upside-down, helped to determine the composition of his permanent entourage, which included many dwarfs. The wedding of the royal dwarf Iakim Volkov in November 1710 provides a striking example of how 'real' and 'mock' court life intermingled, for it took place shortly after the wedding of Peter's niece Anna Ioannovna and Duke Karl of Courland.⁴³ Anna and Karl were then guests at the dwarfs' wedding feast, which was held in the same room in Prince Menshikov's palace as their own had been.⁴⁴ Peter planned both weddings simultaneously, ordering Prince-Caesar to round up dwarfs in Moscow and send them to St Petersburg.⁴⁵ At the feast the dwarfs sat at miniature tables in the centre of the room, while full-sized guests looked on from full-sized tables at the sides of the room, insensitively roaring with laughter as dwarfs fell down drunk in the midst of trying to dance.

Peter rarely travelled without one or two dwarfs. Several instances are recorded of dwarfs leaping from pies, for example during the celebrations for the birth of Tsarevich Peter Petrovich in 1715, when a naked female was served up at the men's table and a naked man at the women's.⁴⁶ He also had a court giant, Nicolas Bourgeois, who in 1720 married a Finnish

43 Juel, 'Iz zapisok', p. 37, when two female dwarfs dressed in the height of French fashion popped out, read some poems and performed a minuet.

44 There are three main descriptions of the wedding: *Exacter Relation von der ... neu erbauten Festung und Stadt St. Petersburg ... von H. G.*, Leipzig, 1713, which includes a seating plan of the banquet; the Danish envoy Just Juel, 'Iz zapisok', pp. 39–41 (reproduced below); and the court record *PZh*, 1710, p. 23. Weber's account, *The Present State of Russia*, I, pp. 285–89, is borrowed, with amendments, from the Leipzig account. The occasion was immortalized in an engraving made in 1711 by Aleksei Zubov, entitled 'The wedding and merriment of His Majesty the Tsar's dwarfs in St Petersburg at which were gathered a great many dwarfs in the house of His Excellency Prince Alexander Danilovich Menshikov, 14 November 1710'. See *Pridvornaia zhizn' 1613–1913: Koronatsii, feierverki, dvortsy*, St Petersburg, 1913, pp. 65–66.

45 *PiB*, X, pp. 270–71.

46 Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, p. 109. Bergholz, *Dnevnik*, 1725, p. 106, records a male dwarf with bottle and glass and a female dressed as a shepherdess popping out of pies at the wedding of Anna Petrovna in May 1725. Twenty-five dwarfs in cloaks and plumed hats marched in the parade before the Kozhukhovo manoeuvres in 1694: see Warner, 'The Kozhukhovo Campaign of 1694' (see note 8 above), p. 491. The groom of 1710 was buried on 1 February 1724. At the funeral, six miniature ponies pulled the coffin and the smallest priest in the city was enlisted to officiate. The procession included giants and the tallest guardsmen, among them the Tsar himself: Bergholz, *Dnevnik*, 1724, pp. 13–14. Palace records include many entries on clothes for dwarfs, for example, in March 1722 a red cloth suit with gold vest with velvet trimmings was made for the dwarf Luka Chestikin: Esipov (ed.), *Sbornik vypisok*, II, p. 97.

‘giantess’. After Bourgeois’s death in 1724 his internal organs, a stuffed effigy made of his skin (Rastrelli took impressions in wax, now lost) and his skeleton went on show in Peter’s Cabinet of Curiosities, where they remain.⁴⁷ Peter also collected young Kalmyks and other natives of the Russian empire, who were prized for their amusingly grotesque (by European standards) features and were treated rather like household pets.⁴⁸ Black servants were popular throughout Europe and there were several (referred to as *arapy*) at Peter’s court, including Abraham Gannibal, the ancestor of the poet Pushkin.⁴⁹

Peter also had a penchant for ‘freaks’ or *monstry*, as most famously expressed in his decree of 1718: ‘It is well-known that in the human species, as in those of animals and birds, monsters are born, that is freaks [*monstry, to est’ urody*], which are collected in all countries as objects of wonder.’ The decree pointed out that some Russians, as a result of ignorance, regarded such monsters as works of the devil, whereas in fact they are products of nature. The public was encouraged to deliver up specimens by a scale of rewards, for example, ten roubles for a dead human specimen, a hundred for a live monster.⁵⁰ Specimens handed in

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- 47 Giants were in shorter supply than dwarfs and Bergholz records that Peter gave his permission for the couple to marry only when the bride-to-be was pregnant, in the hope of obtaining additional tall recruits. Bourgeois was paid the generous salary of 300 roubles per year: Bergholz, *Dnevnik*, 1721, pp. 52–53. See also *200-letie Kabineta ego imp. velichestva 1704–1904*, St Petersburg, 1911 (hereafter *200-letie*), pp. 76–77.
- 48 In 1709 Peter ordered ten pairs of boys and girls to be sent to Moscow: *PiB*, IX, p. 371 (10 September, to P. M. Apraksin). Entries in Cabinet account books list clothing purchased for Kalmyks in 1718: see *200-letie*, p. 252. In 1723 Catherine wrote to Moscow asking for food to be sent for the little Kalmyks who are left in Preobrazhenskoe, ‘as they are dying of hunger and keep drinking water and are now all lying down’. A servant was warned ‘to travel carefully with the Kalmyks and dogs’: LOI, f. 270, d. 105, ll. 15, 16, 17 (19, 22 and 28 March 1723).
- 49 In Amsterdam in 1717 Peter ordered wax models of the dwarf Luka and Abram the black boy (Elena Stolbova, ‘Voskovye portrety v sobranii peterburgskoi Kunstkamery v pervoi polovine XVIII st.’, paper read at the IV International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Hoddesdon, 1989, p. 7).
- 50 *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, v, no. 3159 (13 February); P. P. Pekarskii, *Nauka i literatura v Rossii pri Petre Velikom*, 2 vols, St Petersburg, 1862 (hereafter *Nauka*), I, p. 54. Rewards were higher if specimens were ‘very strange’ (*ochen’ chudnoe*), lower for the only slightly deformed. Peter was disappointed by the poor response and urged his secretary Makarov to take measures to get more specimens: see *200-letie*, p. 76. Cabinet papers record (11 May 1722): ‘His Majesty ordered the payment of 30 roubles to Semen Shikov, peasant of the village of Senikov, for declaring a live female monster, by the name of Natalia Antonova, and to the peasant Mikhail Piskurin [...] from whom that monster was taken, 20 roubles’, *200-letie*, p. 247.

included an eight-legged lamb, a baby with a fish's tail, two dogs born to a sixty-year old virgin and a baby with two heads, four arms and three legs.⁵¹ In 1724, however, the keeper of the Cabinet of Curiosities, Dr Blumentrost, refused to accept another live monster on the grounds that 'in the *Kunstkamera* we keep only dead freaks'.⁵²

Peter did not invent Cabinets of Curiosities (his own interest in such things was kindled in Holland in 1697) and there was nothing peculiarly Russian about his passion for the 'exotic', the miniature, the grotesque and the afflicted. To some extent Peter's taste for the bizarre was a 'typical manifestation of Baroque culture', even of enlightened curiosity.⁵³ But, to cite a recent American study, 'If Peter's interest in "monsters" represents an unsteady and somewhat halting step in the development of scientific thinking in Russia, his morbid fascination with the grotesque and the deformed [...] reveal darker, less familiar themes in Russian culture of the Enlightenment.' The *Kunstkamera* might be understood as a more or less conscious attempt 'to collect and eliminate the various monstrosities of Russian life through the application of European arts and sciences'.⁵⁴

The following anecdotal pronouncement is particularly striking: 'I have ordered the governors to collect monsters and send them to you. Have show cases made. If I wished to send you humans who are monsters not on account of the deformity of their bodies but because of their freakish manners, you would not have space to put them all.'⁵⁵ One might add that Peter himself was a physical 'freak'. Perhaps the addition of his own waxwork to the *Kunstkamera* after his death suggests that he failed to transform even himself into a 'modern, civilized' person.

The story of Peter's bizarre entourage does not stop there. He also kept several full-time jesters, including Stefan 'Medved' (also known as Vytashchii), whose ceremonial duty in the Drunken Assembly was carrying the Prince-Pope's crook, a large sausage.⁵⁶ Sometimes regular

51 Pekarskii, *Nauka*, I, p. 57 (1725).

52 Ibid., p. 56.

53 O. Neverov, "'His Majesty's Cabinet" and Peter I's *Kunstkammer*' in O. Impey and A. McGregor (eds), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in 16th-17th-Century Europe*, Oxford, 1985, p. 54.

54 With thanks to Professor Tony Anemone, College of William & Mary, USA, for a synopsis of his paper 'The Monsters of Peter the Great: The Culture of the *Kunstkammer* in 18th-Century St Petersburg', given at the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia's annual meeting, High Leigh Centre, Hoddesdon, January 1999.

55 Ascribed to Dr Erskine in Maikov, *Rasskazy Nartova o Petre Velikom*, p. 70.

56 Others were Prince Iurii Shakhovskoi, a Frenchman called Vymeni, Taras the Fool (*durak*), and a Portuguese called La Costa, who was declared King of the Samoeds, an honorary title borne by several jesters. See Kurakin, 'Gistoriia o tsare Petre

court personnel were called upon to play the fool. Peter's Danish cook Johann Velten so hated the Swedes that Peter often asked him to impersonate a Swede at ceremonies; he put on a display of weeping at the celebrations of Russia's successful Baltic campaign in 1710.⁵⁷ Spoof ceremonies of all sorts were devised, such as the cook's funeral of February 1724, at which mourners dressed in cook's hats and aprons.⁵⁸ Mock equivalents of 'serious' institutions are still being discovered. In 1699 Peter instituted the very serious Order of St Andrew, a high honour for loyal members of the ruling élite, but it also had its mock counterpart, the Order of Judas, awarded for cowardice and betrayal, created in 1708 in connection with Hetman Ivan Mazepa's defection to the Swedes.

A common feature in most of these antics was the intake of strong drink (even in the *Kunstkamera*, where attendants sometimes drank the spirits used to preserve specimens on the sly). Jacques Campredon, the French resident envoy in St Petersburg, is a rich source of drinking stories. For example, at a party in March 1721 Menshikov handed round huge glasses of Hungarian wine 'without mercy', and all were required to drink to the health of the fleet ('the Tsar's principal delight'). Campredon, on the point of 'expiring' was saved by the start of the fireworks (another of Peter's favourite pastimes) which allowed him to sneak away unobserved.⁵⁹ In May 1723 Peter held a party for his birthday from twelve noon to three in the morning, during which time no one was allowed to leave. Guards officers served raw grain vodka from wooden scoops dipped into a barrel. Campredon confessed that never in his life had he so feared anything as he feared the approach of these 'cups of sorrow'; the next day he was in no fit state to write his regular dispatch to the King.⁶⁰

The games associated with heavy drinking were not a Petrine innovation, of course, or by any means confined to Russia. Prince Boris

Alekseeviche', pp. 385–86; Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, I, p. 256 (1719); Cabinet account book for 1718, *200-letie*, p. 252; S. F. Platonov, *Petr Velikii. Lichnost' i deiatel'nost'*, Paris, 1927 (hereafter *Petr Velikii*), pp. 123–24. Menshikov had his own jester, Prokopii Ushakov, known as Chok: *PiB*, IX, p. 90 (17 February 1709).

57 Juel, 'Iz zapisok', p. 30.

58 Bergholz, *Dnevnik*, 1724, p. 17. See also the wedding in July 1710 of Prince Cherkasskii, so old and feeble that he had to be held up: Juel, 'Iz zapisok', p. 11. One of the last festivities Peter ever attended, in January 1725, was the wedding of Mishka, the manservant of Peter's orderly Vasilii Pospelov, to *gudok*-[rebec] player Nastasia, who was attended by all the *gudok*-players and lords and ladies of the court, *PZh*, 1725, p. 1

59 *SIRIO*, 40, pp. 168–69 (letter of 14 March [NS] 1721).

60 *Ibid.*, 49, pp. 344 (11 June [NS]) A fuller account for the King is dated 13 June, *ibid.*, p. 349.

Kurakin dates the beginning of excessive drunkenness at court to the influence of Peter's Swiss favourite, Franz Lefort, in the 1680s.⁶¹ Even so, Russians were especially famed for their drinking, as foreigners, starting with Sigismund Herberstein, loved to point out, and Peter's reign seems to have been a high point in this respect, with such special refinements as the Great Eagle Cup, Peter's invention, an oversized goblet for drinking forfeits. In August 1721, at a party to celebrate the launch of a new ship, Peter decreed that only Hungarian wine would be drunk, but Menshikov was caught with a glass of Rhine wine, for which he had to drink a penalty of two bottles of strong wine, after which he collapsed in a drunken stupor.⁶²

The time has come to attempt some further analysis. It is useful to remember that Peter's Russia, although chronologically 'early modern', was essentially 'late medieval'. Russia's delayed and incomplete experience of the Renaissance meant, for example, that the separation of popular culture and high culture which can be observed in West European countries had hardly begun. Even high society had a 'rather low level of everyday culture and notions about recreation'.⁶³ It is not just that many members of Peter's retinue were commoners with crude habits (including his second wife, Catherine, a woman from Livonian peasant stock, who as Empress probably drank herself to death), but that even the Russian nobility had not undergone the 'civilizing' process as described in Norbert Elias's classic study, whereby 'courtly people [...] contrasted the refinement of their own social manners, their "standard", to the manners of simpler and socially inferior people'.⁶⁴

What Mikhail Bakhtin called 'the peculiar culture of the marketplace and of folk laughter' in Russia easily infiltrated the royal palace. Peter's Russia is immediately recognizable in Bakhtin's list of 'folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody', although Bakhtin was in fact writing about Western Europe.⁶⁵ Many elements of Petrine play will sound familiar to connoisseurs of late medieval and Renaissance humour, which was often of a coarse and 'knockabout' variety. Lewdness and immortality were especially comic when

61 Kurakin, 'Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche', p. 379.

62 The Prussian envoy Mardefeld, *SIRIO*, 52, p. 195 (11 August [NS]).

63 Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great* (see note 9 above), p. 20.

64 See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Vol. 1, A History of Manners*, trans. E. Jephcott, Oxford, 1978 (translation of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* [1939]), p. 39.

65 From M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* [1965], trans. H. Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN, 1984, p. 4.

committed by the 'pious'. Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1350), with its fornicating monks, nuns and priests, provides a familiar example. Petrine humour is also oddly close to the modern-day British sense of humour, with its love of 'naughty vicar' stories. I was particularly struck by one of the episodes of the TV series *Black Adder*, set in the reign Elizabeth I, in which Edmund Blackadder's friends drunkenly act out the roles of mock 'Cardinal Chunder' and his attendants in one room, while Blackadder attempts to hide their revels from his ultra pious, teetotal and abstemious uncle and aunt in an adjoining room. The joke featuring an obscenely shaped turnip would have appealed to Peter.

Contemporary foreign counterparts of Peter's Drunken Assembly included the 'British Monastery' or Bung-College in St Petersburg, with its Father Superior, to which all the prominent and respectable British residents, and some Germans and Dutchmen, belonged. Punishments were supervised by 'the staff surgeon and pinkle smith or prick farrier'.⁶⁶ There are stories that Peter was initiated into a Masonic lodge by Sir Christopher Wren in 1698 and that he established a lodge in Moscow with Franz Lefort as Grand Master and General Patrick Gordon as Warden.⁶⁷ This all awaits further investigation.

There have been attempts to explain away Peter's humour by laying the blame on foreigners. One formulation of the Prince-Pope's titles was 'patriarch of all Iauza and Kukui', the latter a rude name for the Moscow 'German' Quarter.⁶⁸ Eugene Schuyler wrote: 'Peter and his friends entered with readiness into the *Teutonic custom* [my italics] of masquerading, with which, according to the ruder habits of that time, were joined much coarse horse-play, buffoonery, and practical joking.'⁶⁹ Carnival was indeed a pan-European phenomenon. In some parts of Europe up to three months each year were spent in carnival of one form or

66 See A. G. Cross, 'The Bung College or British Monastery in Petrine Russia', *Study Group on 18th-century Russia Newsletter*, 12, 1984, pp. 4–14; L. N. Semenova, 'Obshchestvennye razvlecheniia v Rossii v pervoi polovine XVIII v.' in N. V. Iukhneva (ed.), *Staryi Peterburg: istoriko-etnograficheskie issledovaniia*, Leningrad, 1982, p. 155. The British ambassador Charles Whitworth mentioned the activities of a 'Brotherhood [...] as true as pleasant, and a great glass of wine sanctified the occasion, I have several other gallantrys no less diverting but they are more proper for conversation than Letter': Letter of 4 February/24 January 1706, British Library Manuscripts, Stafford Papers, Add. MS 31128, fol. 34.

67 N. Hans, 'The Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation (1701)', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 29, 1951, 3, p. 535.

68 *PiB*, I, pp. 31–32. Kukui sounds like *khui* (penis).

69 E. Schuyler, *Peter the Great*, 2 vols, New York, 1984, I, p. 218. Also Platonov, *Petr Velikii*, p. 76: 'The Assembly could take shape [...] only against the background of the society of the Foreign Quarter, of a different faith, largely Protestant and free-thinking'.

another and outside specific carnival periods the 'spirit' of carnival was continued by fools and jesters. At carnival time, laymen and women donned the habits of priests, monks and nuns, even impersonating the Pope in *parodia sacra*.⁷⁰ An ass might be brought into a church to represent God; boy bishops were appointed; clerics composed *joca monacorum*, which included parodies of scripture, prayers and hymns; there were drunken deacons, abbots of fools, popes of jesters.⁷¹ In Britain Hoggles or Hogners collected Yuletide alms rather in the manner of the Drunken Assembly.⁷² One can find much older roots in Roman Saturnalia.

More important for our purposes, there were Russian precedents for Peter's parodies, both *parodia sacra*, such as 'The Liturgy of the Inn' (*Sluzhba kabaku*), and Yuletide mummer customs.⁷³ A monk Grigorii complained to Tsar Aleksei in 1651: 'There are various vile games from Christmas Day to the vigils of Epiphany, during which the participants designate some of their number saints, invent their own monasteries and name for them an archimandrite, a cellarer and *startsyt*'.⁷⁴ Examples are recorded of the 'Game of Tsar' being played at Shrovetide and Yuletide (*sviatki*). Boris Kurakin reported:

There is an old custom among the Russian people before Christmas and after to play at *sviatki*, that is friends gather together at someone's house in the evening and dress up in masquerade costume and the servants of distinguished people act out all sorts of funny stories. According to this custom His Majesty the tsar in his court also played at *sviatki* with his courtiers.

Kurakin went on to describe disapprovingly how in Peter's version people had candles shoved up their backsides, were thrown with bare bottoms onto ice and had air blown up their backsides with bellows (from which at least one died).⁷⁵

The idea that in the West people indulged in sacred parody *for* their own pleasure, not *against* a service or prayer, still less against the Church or religion itself, that 'all "fool" rituals contain religious belief, which is

70 Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, pp. 17, 62.

71 See O. M. Friedenburg, 'The Origin of Parody' in Henry Baran (ed.), *Semiotics and Structuralism: Reading from the Soviet Union*, New York, 1974, pp. 269–83.

72 R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700*, Oxford, 1994.

73 See Likhachev, Panchenko and Ponyrko, *Smekh v drevnei Rusi*; Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 14.

74 Uspenskii, 'Tsar and Pretender', p. 272. See also Iu. Lotman and B. Uspenskii, 'Echoes of the Notion of "Moscow the Third Rome" in Peter the Great's Ideology' Lotman and Uspenskii, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, pp. 53–67.

75 Kurakin, 'Gistoriia o tsare Petre Alekseeviche', p. 386.

merely temporarily masked by its own likeness',⁷⁶ holds good for Russia, too. Jokes were made all the more necessary because the medieval Church condemned laughter as coming from the Devil.⁷⁷ Such sanctions were especially strong in medieval Russia; in Russian *smekh* (laughter) rhymes with *grekh* (sin), *smekhotvorstvo* (making people laugh) was a sin to be confessed, and the devil may be referred to as a jester (*shut*).⁷⁸ Carnival, kept within bounds at special times of year, compensated for such prohibitions and the Church more or less turned a blind eye to 'grotesque degradation' of rituals and symbols. There had to be an outlet for laughter. Thus virtually every Church feast 'sheltered' mock counterparts.⁷⁹

Carnival has also been described as an expression of 'the people's hopes of a happier future, of a more just social and economic order, of a new truth', marked by the temporary suspension of rank, privileges and prohibitions.⁸⁰ In this sense, Peter's carnival was of a peculiarly élite variety. Peter seemed to be seeking personal liberation from 'supernatural awe' and tradition, when these stopped him doing what he wanted to do, both for himself and for Russia. His carnival was not directed against the current 'earthly king' or against his own power, but against the old-style powers and prohibitions.⁸¹

Nor were Peter's games, unlike Ivan the Terrible's, generally directed with malice against targeted 'traitors', even though in the course of them some people were killed accidentally by alcohol poisoning or exploding fireworks. Anisimov speculates that the fact that Peter himself rarely actually got drunk but took the opportunity to 'gossip' with his inebriated associates and guests suggests rather a 'culture of denunciation', in which Peter, increasingly suspicious towards the end of his life, wormed out

76 Friedenburg, 'The Origin of Parody', p. 276, 280.

77 'The very contents of medieval ideology — asceticism, somber providentialism, sin, atonement, suffering, as well as the character of the feudal regime, with its oppression and intimidation — all these elements determined this tone of icy petrified seriousness', Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 73.

78 'Thus parody is not the product of someone's individual invention or someone's merry fantasy. Parody is not imitation, ridicule or mimicry, parody is the archaic religious conception of "the second aspect" and "the double", with a total unity of form and content': Friedenburg, 'The Origin of Parody', pp. 282–83. See also S. S. Averintsev, 'Bakhtin and the Russian Attitude to Laughter' in David Shephard (ed.), *Bakhtin, Carnival and Other Subjects*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, 1993, pp. 13–19.

79 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 75, 82.

80 Ibid., p. 81 ('festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts').

81 Ibid., p. 271 ('the new way of life in Russia made its appearance in masquerade attire', although his claim that 'these carnival forms were an importation rather than a native manifestation' is not entirely true).

secrets by putting people at a disadvantage, as well as conveying a message about the fulfilment of service.⁸²

* * *

Games-playing remained a vital element in eighteenth-century Russian political culture, even if never at the levels of ingenuity reached in Peter's reign. Catherine I was entertained by a female jester or 'Princess-Abbess', Nastas'ia Petrovna Golitsyna, one of whose tricks was to drink from a huge cup of wine to get the coins at the bottom. Sometimes she passed out before she reached them. Under Peter's niece Anna (1730–40) several nobles were relegated to the role of jester, most memorably Prince Mikhail Alekseevich Golitsyn, who had to pretend to be a chicken and sit on eggs in a large basket. In 1740 Anna married him off to a Kalmyk woman at a ceremony attended by other non-Russian natives, all regarded as funny-looking. They were transported in carriages drawn by camels, goats and pigs to a palace on the ice of the Neva river, where they had to lie naked on an ice bed wearing ice nightcaps and slippers.⁸³ Peter's daughter Elizabeth (reigned 1741–61) adored masquerades and masked balls, for which she devised complicated dress codes and penalties. Cross-dressing was one of the highlights of these occasions. Fifteen thousand dresses and several thousand pairs of shoes were found in her closets after her death.

But Peter's interlocking mock institutions seem to have died with their initiator. His female successors did not appoint mock tsars. They themselves could hardly rise up through the ranks of army and navy (although they sometimes donned female versions of guards uniforms for parades), nor could they periodically don workman's overalls to do a bit of wood-turning or labour in the docks. Most importantly, they did not command Peter's personal authority. Humour also changed with the times. By the reign of Catherine II (1762–96) the grosser forms of medieval humour seemed uncivilized (although popular legend has it that Catherine invented new games for the bedroom). Catherine deplored the childish pastimes of her husband Peter III, who was known to court-martial rats. But her lover Platon Zubov kept a dwarf and her son Paul was addicted to

82 Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great*, pp. 21–22.

83 See E. Anisimov, *Zhenishchiny na russkom prestole*, St Petersburg, 1997, pp. 104–05. Anisimov believes such occasions were simply for fun and entertainment, without any higher purpose, as well as acting as a safety-valve. In his view, the aristocratic jesters were not especially humiliated; playing the fool was just another form of Russian state service.

military games, as in some respects was his son Alexander I, who was also devoted to tight-fitting military uniforms.⁸⁴

* * *

In the end, does it really matter that Peter behaved a bit oddly? In the final analysis, was he not a great ruler, who beat the Swedes, expanded the empire and made Russia top pig-iron producer? I do not deny that Peter did all these things and more, but it is the duty of the historian to point out the truth as she or he finds it through the study and judicious analysis of sources. Sometimes this means knocking heroes off their pedestals or placing them on an alternative plinth. Peter remains very much alive in Russia today, an important reference point for Russian leaders and ordinary citizens alike, not to mention key groups in the army and navy. Among them, the alternative, playful Peter has not found much favour because they do not really know him. In an opinion poll conducted in Moscow in 1994 on the question 'Of which era of Russian history can Russians be most proud?', some 54 per cent chose Peter's reign. (Stalin's was second, with about 20 per cent). This modern view of Peter is suggested by the caption on packs of 'Peter I' cigarettes, which are allegedly 'capable of satisfying the most discriminating connoisseur who believes in the revival of the traditions and greatness of the Russian land'.

Let no one base hopes for the future on misunderstandings about the past. My aim is not to discredit Peter, whom in many ways I admire; the alternative history of Peter the Great may show up his weaknesses and idiosyncrasies, but it also underlines his complexities and versatility. Recognition of the play elements in historical Russian rulership may also provide a better understanding of modern Russian politics. How, for example, should we understand Boris El'tsin's preference for Peter as a role model?⁸⁵ There is no hint in any of his writings that El'tsin is imitating the All-Jesting Peter or understands or appreciates the Alternative History: his references are always to Peter as Great Reformer and Westernizer, struggling against the odds. At one stage El'tsin even dreamed of studying at the Institute of Shipbuilding.⁸⁶

84 The legend that Alexander faked his own death in 1725 and lived out the rest of his life as the holy man Ivan Kuzmich in Siberia suggests a further variation on pretendership.

85 See the analysis in Fedor Burlatskii, *Glotok Svobody*, book 2, Moscow, 1997, pp. 328–29 ('El'tsin constantly refers to Peter the Great, justifying his radical steps and harsh methods by his example'), and L. Hughes, 'Peter the Great and the Fall of Communism', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 17, 1997, pp. 1–18.

86 Boris Yeltsin, *Against the Grain: An Autobiography*, trans. Michael Glenny, London, 1990, p. 24. When El'tsin went aboard the vessel 'Petr Velikii', the pride of the

But at the same time, El'tsin has echoed the Alternative History, consciously or not, by his own 'clowning' behaviour. We recall him spontaneously conducting a band in Germany a few years ago. Peter was a dab hand with drum sticks. In Dresden in June 1698 he 'took a drum and in the presence of ladies beat it so expertly that he outdid all the other drummers.'⁸⁷

El'tsin has expressed annoyance that Western perceptions of Russians have not changed much since Peter's time. For example, he complained about a report of his first visit to the United States in the paper *La Republicca* which made him 'look like the usual drunken, lumbering, ill-mannered Russian bear at his first encounter with civilised society'.⁸⁸ Like Peter, whose crude behaviour was much criticized by foreigners, El'tsin resents such responses. At the same time, again like Peter, he seems to encourage them by behaving badly (although in this respect we may have to distinguish the boisterous behaviour of his early years in power with the illness-induced lapses of more recent times). Russians are, on the one hand, cynical about their rulers; on the other, they sometimes seem to admire such behaviour perhaps because, perversely, it arouses patriotic sentiments precisely by its 'un-Western', natural, even 'democratic' nature.⁸⁹

Are then the rules of the game of Russian politics different from ours? It is vital to retain a cautious awareness of 'otherness' in our study of Russian history in general and élite political culture in particular. The abstract, rational, Enlightened approach through the study of government institutions and constitutions and political theory will get you only so far. In the past couple of decades the study of patrimonial politics, kinship and clientele networks, as well as bribery and the underworld, have enhanced our understanding of Russian history, as have anthropological and semiotic studies of ceremony, ritual and behaviour. Using these approaches in reference to Peter's reign, the games-playing phenomenon

Russian navy, in August 1998 (in the midst of Russia's economic crisis) we can be sure that he was not alluding to play or 'messing about' in boats, but to the qualities of heroism, endurance and greatness aroused by association.

87 N. Pavlenko, *Petr Velikii*, Moscow, 1990. p. 79.

88 Yeltsin, *Against the Grain*, p. 199.

89 Westerners continue to perceive modern Russian politics as somewhat bizarre. Recently I noted a small item in the British press under the heading 'Yeltsin just isn't himself: Is it the ruler of Russia or is it his double?'. Apparently a member of the Duma had alleged that El'tsin was replaced by a lookalike two years ago, claiming to have photographic evidence of the fraud. It is hard to imagine such a rumour gaining currency about a senior statesman in the UK, even though the British press often alludes with satirical intent to the dummy-like smiles and puppet-like responses of certain politicians.

can be integrated, rather than marginalized. If we believe that Peter's reign was successful in certain respects, do we conclude that playing games contributed to his success, or that he might have achieved more if he had not wasted so much time playing the fool? I leave members of the audience to ponder and draw their own conclusions.

DOCUMENTS

I

SELECTED LETTERS FROM PETER TO PRINCE-CAESAR AND THE CHIEF SHIPWRIGHT

- (1) *Peter [Petrushka Alekseev] to Prince Fedor Iur'evich
Romodanovskii, 19 June 1695, from Panshin, en route for Azov¹*

Mi Her Kenih

On the 14th of this month your father the great lord, most holy prelate Ianikita [Zotov], archbishop of Presburg and patriarch of all Iauza and all Kukui, and also your slaves General Avtamon Mikhailovich [Shein] and Franz Iakovlevich [Lefort] arrived here in good health with all [the troops] accompanying them and this day, the 19th, set off from Panshin also in good health.

Your illustrious Majesty's humble servants bow before you:

Ivan Buturlin Junior Iashka Brius [James Bruce]

Fetka Troekurov Petrushka Alekseev

Ivashka Gumert

[PiB, 1, p. 32]

¹ All documents have been translated by Lindsey Hughes, with explanatory material in square brackets inserted by the translator.

- (2) *To Prince F. I. Romodanovskii, from Amsterdam, 31 August 1697, handwritten*

Min Her Kenih

Your royal letter has been delivered, for which inestimable kindness, all the more [appreciated] on the day of the holy apostles, I prostrate myself before you many times and am happy to serve you as best I can.

Those who have been sent by your orders to study [abroad] have all been sent to their [appointed] places [...]. All the aforementioned have been allocated to duties according to their wishes

Aldach Knech Piter

[*Zakonodatel'nye akty Petra I*, comp. N. A. Voskresenskii, Moscow and Leningrad, 1945 (hereafter *ZA*), pp. 180–81]

- (3) *Note from Peter on the receipt of his shipwright's salary, 29 January 1701*

In this year 1701 on the 29th day of January, by the command of the great sovereign [Fedor Iur'evich] it was ordered to pay his, the great sovereign's [Fedor's] allowance, on the authorization of the lords of the admiralty, to the following ranks, who have studied the art of shipbuilding in neighbouring states, for the period from 1 January 1701 to 1 January 1702. Their names are listed below:

To Shipwright [*Bas*] Peter Mikhailov, three hundred and sixty six roubles.

[Peter signed the receipt: 'Piter Michailof has taken the money']

[*PiB*, 1, p. 424]

- (4) *To Prince F. I. Romodanovskii, 21 November 1704, from Narva*

Siir²

Although I am unable to take part in your joyful celebration, however, as is my humble duty, I congratulate you, our sovereign, on the birth of Your Majesty's grandson and our Tsarevich, Aleksandr Ioannovich, in the hope that the Lord God may grant that the child grows well and enjoys a long life with the flourishing of his grandfather's reign.

Iv aldach Knecht Piter

[*PiB*, 3, p. 195]

2 In these and other letters the title/name of recipient and sender are usually written in Latin script, the rest of the text in Russian.

- (5) *To Prince F. I. Romodanovskii, 8 October 1705, from Grodno*

Siir

As I have written to you already, be so good as to send those criminals from Astrakhan here: I reiterate — you should send them here.

Also send Bruce's wood-turning lathe (which is now in the Foreign Quarter [in Moscow] in the house of the foreigner Schepor, who lives in the apartments where Brandt once lived), together with the fittings and wheel. Also be so good as to send that other lathe, the one which works with a pedal not a wheel, which that foreigner knows about. Also send with the lathes some olive wood, *pokgout* [?], ebony and elephant and fish tusks. Also when [Andrew] Stiles sends a similar lathe from Archangel, be so good as to send it here.

PS. Once and for all, send all of the musketeer colonels who were on the Azov campaigns here, paying no heed to their excuses.

[PiB, 3, pp. 454–45]

- (6) *To Prince F. I. Romodanovskii, 31 August 1708, on a Russian victory against the Swedes in Lithuania, handwritten*

Siire

I wish to inform Your Majesty that yesterday morning, after adjourning the military council, we attacked the right flank of the King of Sweden, who was stationed across two rivers and marshes (in the presence of his whole army), with eight battalions under the command of Major-General [Mikhail] Golitsyn and several squadrons, calling on God's help, and after two hours of unceasing gunfire we broke through those proud foes and entered their camp, took several standards and laid out about three thousand corpses as well as wounded. These five regiments were all native Swedes, under the command of Major General Roos. I attach a list of the names of the regiments and the number of casualties on our side, among which, be so good as to note, the regiment entrusted to me did its job better than the others. I congratulate Your Majesty on this victory.

Piter

[ZA, p. 181]

- (7) *Letter to F. Iu. Romodanovskii, from Kotlin island, 28 April 1713*

Sire

The captain sent here by Your Majesty has appeared and has announced your request about the villages of your deceased uncle [M. G. Romodanovskii]. But since I am about to set off from here and on account of my imminent departure am unable to serve Your Majesty in this matter, I beg Your Majesty to allow us to put off this business until September, by which time I beg that you yourself will be so good as to come here in person to deal with this matter or, if time allows, we shall visit you. In the meantime be assured that without your permission, this matter will not be settled.

Peter

[*PiB*, 13, 1992, pp. 141–42]

- (8) *Letter from Peter and several shipwrights to Ivan Mikhailovich Golovin, from St Petersburg, 2 January 1714*

Your Honour Mr Ba[a]s, our highly esteemed teacher!

We the below-mentioned could not help but send Your Honour greetings for the beginning of this New Year, to congratulate you and to wish you every happiness and success in your high and wise affairs, in the hope that this great enterprise [that is, shipbuilding] will increase and grow to your immortal glory as its initiator in Russia or our second Noah by calling; and most of all we wish that you will be so good as not to forget us and that you will pay us a visit in order to be greeted in person.

Your Excellency's pupils and servants. Peter. Richard Browne. Richard Cozens, Joseph Nye. Saltykov.

[*Sbornik Mukhanova*, 2nd edn, St Petersburg, 1866, p. 251 (which mistakenly identifies it as a letter to Romodanovskii); LOI, f. 270, d. 75, l. 5 (2 January 1714)]

- (9) *Peter to Admiral Fedor Mikhailovich Apraksin, from St Petersburg, 13 September 1714*

I arrived here with the captured ships [from the battle of Hangö] on the 9th of this month and on the same day we were all received by His Majesty [Prince-Caesar], where I handed over the letter from you. His

Majesty deigned to ask after your health and praised your loyal service, whereupon he awarded me the rank of vice-admiral, for which I thank your honour for recommending me.

Peter

[LOI, f. 270, d. 76, l. 119]

(10) *Letter to Prince Ivan Fedorovich Romodanovskii, 21 February 1718*

Sire

Just as we appealed to Your Majesty orally, now also we ask in writing that you be so good as to take over the affairs of the Preobrazhenskii office, just as your late father of blessed memory directed it previously.

Peter

[ZA, pp. 181–82]

(11) *Letter to Prince I. F. Romodanovskii, 16 July 1722*

Sire

We beg to inform Your Majesty that on this day we, together with the general admiral [F. M. Apraksin], set sail from Astrakhan on your royal service with all the local fleet, and we hope with God's help soon to reach the Persian shores.

Your Majesty's most humble servant, Peter

[ZA, pp. 182]

II

THE DWARFS' WEDDING: EXTRACT FROM JUST JUEL'S JOURNAL

19 November [New Style] 1710

Today a large number of male and female dwarfs arrived in St Petersburg, gathered from all over Russia by the Tsar's command. They were rounded up like cattle, into a large room in the royal cellars where nothing had been prepared for them and spent several days there suffering from cold and hunger. No provisions were made to feed them, so they were fed by the donations sent to them out of pity by private persons. The Tsar was out of town at the time. After several days had passed, when His Majesty returned he visited the dwarfs and personally distributed them as he saw fit among Prince Menshikov, the chancellor [G. F. Golovkin], vice-chancellor [P. Shafirov], general admiral [F. M. Apraksin] and other princes and boyars, allocating a smaller number to some, a larger to others, depending on their means. These persons were ordered by His Majesty to look after the dwarfs until the wedding of a male and female dwarf who served at the Tsar's court. The decision to have this wedding was made by the Tsar himself and was carried out against the wishes of the bride and groom. The Tsar ordered the boyars to fit out the dwarfs allocated to them in sumptuous lace gowns, gold tunics and so on; until then not only did these dwarfs have no proper winter coats but they were even half-naked. Following his usual practice, the Tsar paid not a copeck out of his own pocket. The persons to whom they were entrusted had to keep and clothe the dwarfs; they bowed to the Tsar's will and without the slightest protest collected the dwarfs and took them home. The Tsar scheduled the wedding for the following Tuesday and sent two dwarfs to my house with an invitation; they arrived at my residence in an open cart.

25 November [NS. 14 Nov. OS]

The guests gathered at the Tsar's [winter] palace early in the morning. The princes and boyars dressed their dwarfs and brought them with them. On the Neva a number of small and large barges were prepared in which the company crossed to the [Peter-Paul] fortress. The ceremony was to be held in the cathedral. Opposite the fortress, on the quay, the Tsar himself seated the dwarfs in boats. The groom [Iakim Volkov] crossed first with the Tsar. Behind them went one of the most handsome dwarfs, with a small marshal's mace in his hand. Then there followed in pairs eight groomsmen dwarfs; then the bride accompanied by two escorts, who went

to invite the guests to the wedding. Behind the bride walked 14 dwarfs in pairs and at the end 35 more dwarfs. The oldest, ugliest and biggest brought up the rear. I counted 62 dwarfs altogether, although it is said that there were more. Dressed in splendid and expensive clothes of French design, they seemed all the funnier because they did not know how to comport themselves, since the majority of them were of peasant origin and had been raised in rustic mode.

In this manner the dwarfs entered the fortress. There they were met by a regiment playing music with standards unfurled. Part of the regiment stood on guard by the gates, others by the cathedral. The bride and groom were married according to the usual nuptial rites, only they did not drink to each other's health or dance around the lectern. The Tsar ordered that these ceremonies be omitted as he was in a hurry. Throughout the ceremony, all around one could hear stifled giggles and sniggering, as a result of which the holy offices were more reminiscent of a fair-booth comedy than a wedding or a church service. The priest himself was so overcome by laughter that he could barely read out the prayers.

In my view, you could divide the dwarfs into three types. Some reminded me of two-year-old children; they were attractive and had well-proportioned limbs. The groom was among them. Others were more like four-year-olds. If you did not take into account their heads, which were mostly huge and ugly, they were quite well-proportioned. The bride belonged to this group. The third and last category were like ancient old men and women. If you saw only their bodies you might take them for old men of normal size. But their hands and feet were so short, crooked and deformed that they could hardly walk.

From the cathedral the dwarfs returned to the river Neva in the same order in which they had arrived and got into small barges. The guests got into their boats and the whole procession rowed down to the palace of Prince Menshikov [on Vasil'evskii island] where the wedding feast was to be held. In the great hall six small oval tables had been laid with miniature plates, spoons, knives and so on. The tables were arranged in an oval. The bride and groom sat opposite each other, she at the top, he at the lower table. Above both him and her was suspended a crimson canopy from which hung a green garland. But it proved impossible for all the dwarfs to be seated at these six tables and so another small round table had to be set for the oldest and ugliest. Seated at table the latter looked like people fully developed physically, but when they stood up the tallest seemed no higher than a six-year old child, although in fact all of them were more than twenty years old. Around the hall along the walls stood four large tables, at which the guests sat with their backs to the wall and facing the dwarfs. The edge of the table facing the middle of the room was left free so that they all had a good view of the dwarfs seated at the small tables. At the

top one of the large tables, ladies were seated; at the other three — men. [...]

In the evening, when the candles were brought into the hall, small candles were set on the tables in front of the dwarfs in slender gilded wooden candlesticks. Before the dancing began, the tables where the dwarfs had dined were removed and the benches moved up to the big tables. While some dwarfs danced, others sat at the benches. The guests watched this comedy from the same seats as before. The real entertainment now began. The dwarfs, even those who could barely walk, had to dance, come what may. Now and then they would fall over and as most of them were drunk, when they fell down they could not get up again and slid about on the floor for a long time in vain efforts to stand up until they were lifted by their companions. There were many amusing clashes between the drunken dwarfs. For example, while they danced they quarrelled and bickered like nothing on earth, slapped the female dwarfs on the face if they didn't like the way they danced and so on. The laughter and noise which enlivened this wedding are beyond description. As the Tsar's personal dwarf, the newly-wedded groom had been trained in various skills and he himself had prepared a small firework display; but that same evening the only son of Prince Menshikov died and therefore the celebrations ended early and the fireworks were not set off. The Tsar is very fond of this dwarf as he had taken part with His Majesty in the major campaigns and was by his side at Poltava and also other battles. Usually above St Petersburg the Neva ices over around 25–26 November. This year on 26 November the ice from Lake Lagoda was so strong that only at the risk of life and limb could one cross to the fortress using oars.

(Just Juel represented the King of Denmark in St Petersburg from 1709 to 1711. His journal was published in Danish as *En reise til Rusland under Tsar Peter: Dagbogsoptegnelser af viceadmiral Just Juel dansk gesandt i Rusland 1709–1711*, Copenhagen, 1893. The fullest Russian edition is *Zapiski Iusta Iulia, datskogo poslannika pri Petre Velikom (1709–1711)*, Moscow, 1900.

